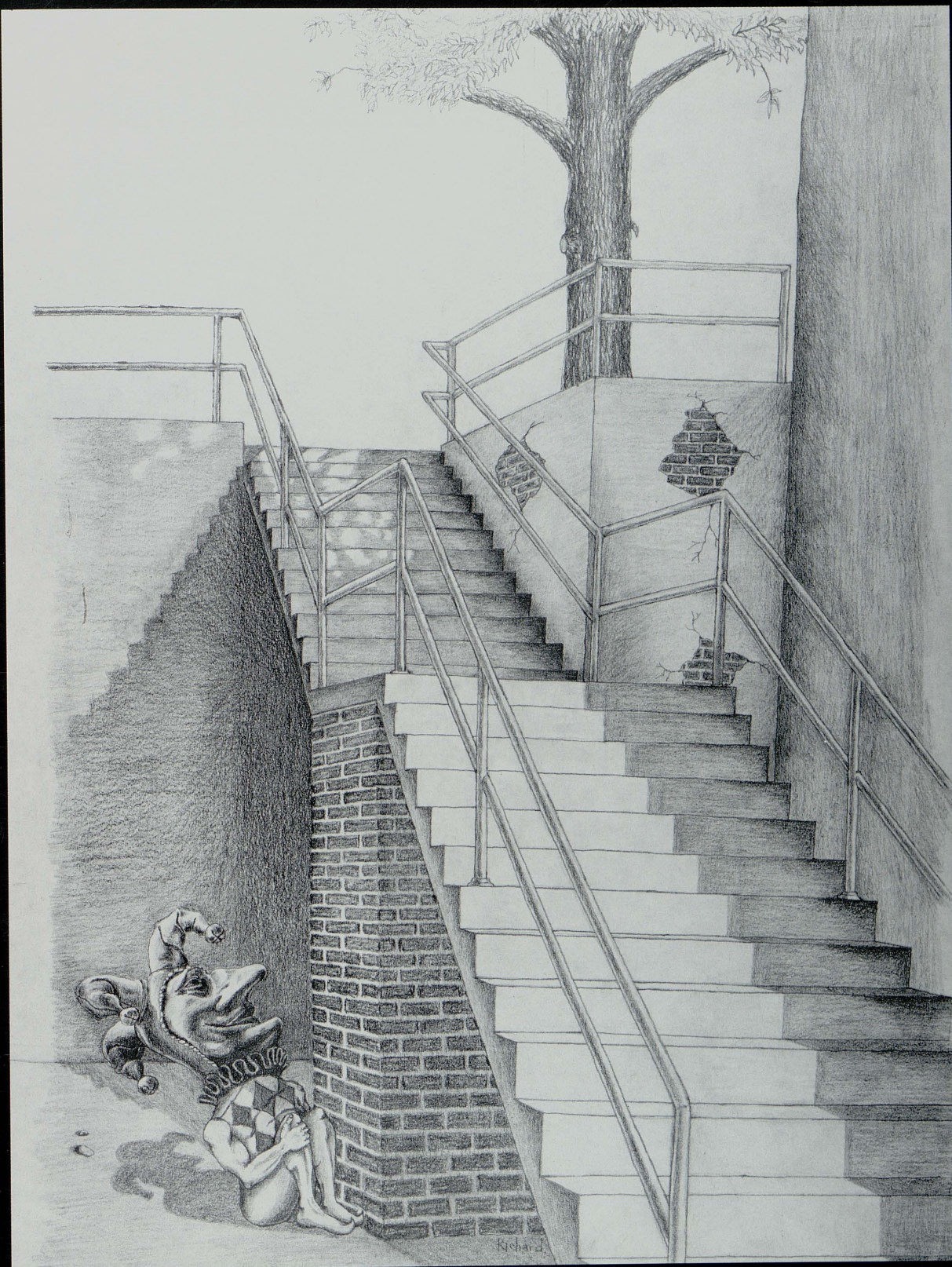


# TJC Touchstone

## 2001







# TJC Touchstone

## 2001



*Old Downtown Lori D. Martin*



## Foreword

Why does one write? Why does one draw, paint or take photographs? The question has no single answer. Some may have been inspired by an idea one day — an idea so vivid, so alive it had to be birthed by the artist's hand. Others may decide to share a beauty they feel everyone should behold. From the photographer taking the perfect shot at sunset in the Grand Canyon, to the writer who jots down what she feels after the thrill of a lifetime, they both wish to show others sights and scenes to inspire and provoke. Others choose to write as a non-violent means of releasing inner anger and turmoil. No matter what the reason, writers and artists work to express their inner selves. We may not know the reasons for the collected work in this publication, but we can know what the creators were feeling.

Abraham Licerio, editor



*Cowboy* Clint C. Crawford



# Staff

## Editors:

Kristi Flippin  
Abraham Licerio  
Mike Pero  
Julie Steck

## Advisor:

Linda K. Zeigler

**TJC Touchstone**  
**Volume 16**  
**2001**

## About the title:

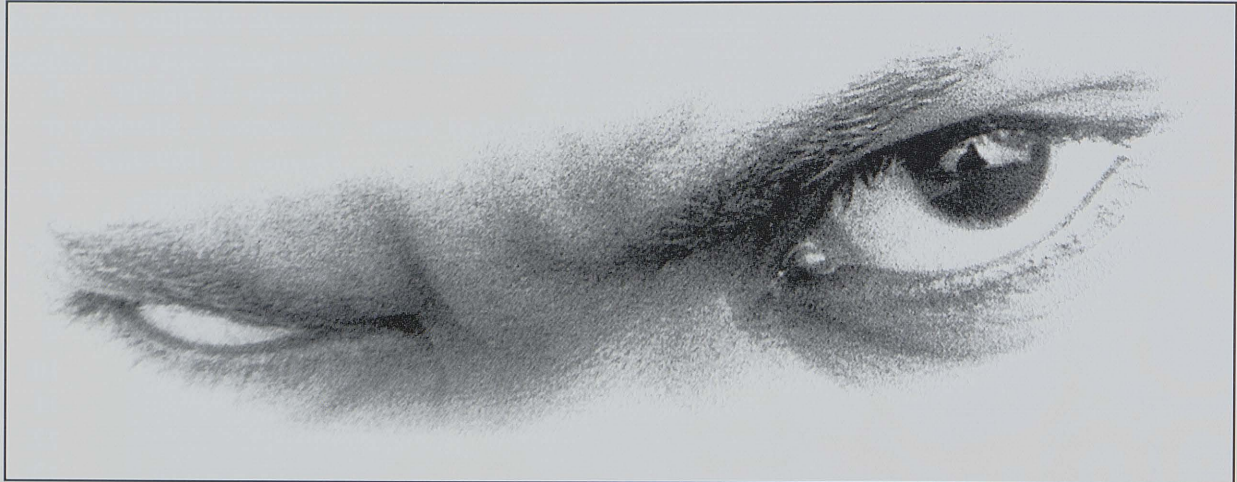
A distinctive streak left on a black touchstone when rubbed with genuine silver or gold was a foolproof test which allowed ancient civilizations to trust using coins to trade. We trust that you, too, will find genuine distinctive elements of value within the TJC Touchstone.

Carolyn Hendon  
1986

# Contents

The Joker	Richard Blackstone	Cover
Old Downtown	Lori D. Martin	1
Cowboy	Clint C. Crawford	2
Eye See You	Christy L. Smith	4
Thy Grace	Vanessa Adams	4
Self Esteem	Amy D. Phillips	5
Moments Before Sleep	Shauna D. Starns	5
Dix Sept Triumphant	Charity M. Potter	6
English Sonnet to the Bard of Avon	Catherine L. Starkey	6
Mirror, Mirror	Theresa R. Fletcher	7
Reflections	Vanessa Adams	7
The Person I Admired Most	Arleen B. Wright	8
Captivity	Linda Maikori	8
Hope for the Hopeless	Bryanna L. Wilson	9
Second	Charity M. Potter	9
Take This Day	Vanessa Adams	10
The Dreamer	Phyllis A. Gray	11
Memories of Brenda	Nicki A. Haynes	12
Historic Tyler	Lori D. Martin	12
America's Game	Jamie L. Humphrey	14
Honestly	Shauna D. Starns	15
Waiting	Shauna D. Starns	15
Caveat	Earl G. Lovelady	16
Rainy Nights	Jamie I. Humphrey	16
A Lonely Girl	Nicki A. Haynes	17
Insomnia	Amy D. Phillips	18
Behind the Mask	Amy D. Phillips	19
Wolves	Tiffany C. Wooten	20
Dear Brother	Cynthia D. Nutt	21
Dad	Forrest B. Brown	21
My Love's Prayer	Jason B. Bates	22
Mamma Bear	Amy D. Phillips	22
Destitution	Stacey L. McKain	23
Adrift	Earl G. Lovelady	24
Solitude	Lori D. Martin	24





*Eye See You Christy L. Smith*

## Thy Grace

*Vanessa Adams*

I take for granted  
The light the sun sheds  
Invading warmth across the face  
Of this Earth in frozen space.

I take for granted  
The twinkle of a million stars  
Glints of light from distance afar  
Dispersing hope against the dark.

I take for granted  
Each day I awaken  
Each time my eyes behold the light  
And find it day instead of night.

I take for granted  
The illuminescence of the moon  
reflections of daylight's soul  
Against blackened nights so cold.



# Self Esteem

*Amy D. Phillips*

Somehow I have convinced my heart that I can fill this void  
That within time I will have an accomplishment that will allow me to feel worth  
I can't explain why a medal or certificate holds my self-esteem  
But my mind has decided that the price of my soul can be financed by gratification  
I constantly look to you for approval  
Don't deny me this essential fuel  
Because if you do, you are killing me  
You are destroying the person that wants to be so much  
You are winning the battle for my self-esteem  
Before I can even throw a punch

# Moments Before Sleep

*Shauna D. Starns*

I spent the second day alone  
Lost, within my thoughts  
They float away, and I reel them in  
Pilfer their contents  
Then toss them out

I view the salvaged remnants  
Scattered in my head  
Raise a tiny flicker  
And kiss my blessed find

Relax my eyes  
Unfurl my body

I ponder the depths of a tiny  
Moment  
And dream the dream  
It is



## Dix Sept Triumphant

*Charity M. Potter*

eyes and hands of Whitman's son  
shouted rhymes for hot cross buns  
for Renoir's daughter to succumb  
to oceans of grief that drown his eyes  
and prosper inquiries that drown her cries

dreams that fancy free footloose  
wreak havoc in her underbelly  
light slow bleeding on the water  
eyes and hands of Renoir's daughter  
ruddy cheeks and supple thighs

The mysteries she cannot prove  
The mountains that he feign would move  
"Tu voudras?" et "Ou se trouve?"  
"Check please. I'll be leaving soon."  
One less application to approve

## English Sonnet to the Bard of Avon

*Catherine L. Starkey*

Right from day one it was a chore  
To comprehend you "Thou and Thee."  
If I knew then what was in store,  
I might not now be here, you see.

Whil'st wishing we'd get back to fiction,  
To me 'twas neither here nor there-a,  
But on I searched through Webster's diction  
A purpose to your 'standard-bearer.'

And lo, in time amid confusion,  
I'm glad my teacher pursued the quest.  
I came at last to this conclusion,  
And I hope you know 'tis all in jest:

For time well-spent, this I do allow-  
I knew ye not; I know you now.



# Mirror, Mirror

*Theresa R. Fletcher*

Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
I look into you and see nothing at all.  
Then I take a step back, and what do I see?  
It's a young girl, staring back at me,  
Begging me to come and play,  
Just for once wash all my tears away.  
I look at her with nothing to say,  
And slowly her sparkle fades away.  
Now I am staring at who I've become,  
Someone who is distant, fake and numb.  
Then my eyes begin to fill with tears,  
As I realize the changes over the years.  
My childhood was stolen and torn apart,  
By building these walls I could protect my heart.  
When I built these walls I sealed them tight,  
Hiding myself from all the light.  
When I cried out, no one came,  
Igniting anger I thought I could tame.  
So, I tucked it away like my sadness and fear,  
I thought this way they would disappear.  
I hid them in the darkness where no one could see,  
Now I could pretend I was truly happy.  
Everyone believed me, they never knew I was fake;  
Before I knew it, I had become someone I hate.  
I made myself believe the lies,  
By turning away and closing my eyes.  
It was that day that my spirit died,  
Leaving me with nothing inside.  
Spirits are like plants, they need light,  
Without it I had lost my sight.  
Don't be like me and hide your feelings,  
Embrace them completely, so you can start healing.

## Reflections

*Vanessa Adams*

Do leaves from trees  
Define it all?  
Is that what made them  
Call it fall?

Witness they not  
Artistry finest  
From green to gold  
Colors so bold  
Orange and red  
Adorning threads  
Blades so white  
Frosted delight  
Skies so blue  
Of infinite hue  
Air so clear  
And breath so dear —??

'Tis not fall  
Just kaleidoscoped facets —  
The revolving screens  
Of life manifested.



# The Person I Admired Most

*Arleen B. Wright*

The person I admired the most was my grandfather, Theophilus Wright. My unsung hero was an 88 year-old, thin, stylish man without a strong personality, but affable in manner. To me, he was a recreation of Biblical reveries because of the patience, love, faithfulness, joy and peace he exhibited even in the most difficult situation.

"Old age" was a myth to him, because even at that epoch he never deterred nor complained, but found great pleasure in religiously waking up early on Sunday mornings to open the church and ring the bell. He always proclaimed, "God gave me strength, so I will use it for Him."

His love for his family could be seen in the unselfish sacrifices he made. He toiled tirelessly beneath the burning sun or through the thundering rain on his farm and earned a livelihood for his fourteen children. He proudly and ably raised them alone after Grandmother's death, with the same tenacity as when she was alive.

You would think that was enough; but it is undeniable that he was the backbone in seeing the fear of the Lord instilled in them. Not all, but most of them are impacting the Christian world today because of those ancient seeds planted by my hero. Teenagers were always looking for a role model and they found

that in him. Age was kind to his ears, eyes and mind, so he was always available to hear, see and help one work through his or her difficulty.

Even up to his death, his existence was dependent on giving an encouraging word, lending a helping hand, making a heart happy with the music from his dream of a quiet life than being a missionary and yet, his life helped to blossom that seed.

The last time I saw him alive his words to me were, "Death is sure, so live each day for the Lord." They are remnants that daily haunt me in a positive way as a reminder to make right choices. What a man! I posthumously salute my hero.

## Captivity

*Linda Maikori*

Oh, for how long shall we continue in this pain? How long should we be bound in these chains? Our voices are long gone, leaving us to the noise, the sounds of these chains. Stored in our brains not willing to disappear.

Every day crying and waking up to a new day and discovering that nothing has indeed changed. Not knowing anything about joy, but agony, pain and distress which has been left for us to embrace because we know otherwise.

The crackling of chains, filling our minds and not being able to recognize any other sound.

Doomed to sickness, poverty, old age and subsequently death. Our muffled cries have been blocked away by tall walls, towering high above us and burying us alive, never again to see the outside world, which was indeed a far cry from what we are now going through.

And in which we remember that somewhere, sometime, in the back of our minds laid something, something special in which we faintly remember, something close to a smile, which has long disappeared from our faces, a little laughter which now seems so far-fetched and forgotten.





*Hope for the Hopeless* Bryanna L. Wilson

## Second

*Charity M. Potter*

it was pounding in my ears  
and monkey-like I swung on  
sockless feet  
straining extending thinking "Go Go Gadget arm"  
my monkey arms pulling the tiny little strings  
all the way down to my  
sweaty sockless feet

for a fractured second  
I felt the connection and heard the hollow rapport  
and all those tiny snapping strings within  
exuberant toes  
rejoiced  
for a fractured second

my eyes don't seem sheltered  
and my hands are plagued like those of an athlete  
and even though the frets are worn  
and the delicate strings are snapping  
it doesn't bother me that my hands are plagued  
for a favored second



# Take This Day

*Vanessa Adams*

A gunshot shatters  
The peace of evening  
And a figure falls  
Fingers grasping, clinging  
To a fast fading life  
As life's force rushes  
Another soul from strife  
As all around him hushes.

A car speeds forward  
Towards destiny waiting  
And no wise uttered word  
Can stop the actions taken  
As the car hurtles forth  
Too fast, too late to evade  
As life collides with death's force  
And another soul fades away.

A man alone walks the night  
Engrossed in thoughts all his own.  
Reflecting at his saddened plight  
As others plot wickedness upon  
A struggle ensues bravely fought  
By his one against their many  
Yet right versus wrong avails him not  
He loses — small chance he had, if any.

And who among us can really say  
As we exist from day to day  
Just what may come or may happen  
Today is given until its end  
And what was, will it still be so  
Among the many whom we know  
Which among them may still be near  
Or who of them might disappear?

Each of us walking in our ways  
Knows some sad story and regrets  
That all we do or might say  
Can't stop the sadness coming next.  
And today it's my soul that deeply grieves  
As I hear the other tragic stories  
Of ones who must abruptly leave  
And the ones left who grieve for these.





*The Dreamer Phyllis A. Gray*

TJC Touchstone 2001



# Memories of Brenda

*Nicki A. Haynes*

I'll never forget the last time I saw her. It was a beautiful Sunday morning in mid-November. We stood on the lawn of the church in the bright sunshine and laughed together as friends will do.

"Brenda, you don't look your age."

"Thank you, Nicki," and she smiled.

"Of course keeping up with three boys may have

something to do with it," I pushed. "No, wait, you have four boys."

Brenda cast a sideways glance at her husband Larry, standing a short distance away and her smile broadened. "You have a point!"

We leaned against each other briefly, enjoying the moment that only friendship can give, not knowing, never dreaming, it would be the last time. Three weeks later, De-

cember 6, 1995, Brenda collapsed while getting ready for work one morning. She was pronounced dead of a heart attack at a nearby hospital a short time later. She was three months away from her 35 birthday.

I also remember the first time I met Brenda. It was a spring day in 1974. Growing up in a small East Texas town was at times uneventful.





But in the early 1970's Little Dribblers came to our area; for us it was like a dream come true. You see, we loved to play basketball. Little Dribblers was and still is organized so youngsters play basketball in the spring and early summer. Of the twenty or so girls that had started, twelve of us made the trip to Huntsville, Texas in mid-June for the state play-offs. We played in a gym that registered about 100 degrees, or seemed that hot on the court. Our first game was

against a team from Dallas with players as tall as six feet. Brenda was our tallest, 5' 6" in her shoes, maybe. We lost 41-7, but we played hard and never gave up trying to score. Brenda played so hard she would hyperventilate. A popcorn sack was kept on the bench by the end of the second quarter for her to breathe in and restore normal breathing. I don't think she knew how to give less than 100%. She became special to me because she never gave up. I found myself wanting to be as good as Brenda.

As eighth graders, we played on separate school teams against each other in a tournament. It gave me a sense of *deja vu* somehow. Brenda's team won and she received an All Tournament trophy. The next year we were teammates once again as my elementary school did not have a high school. We were also classmates and friends now. I always thought Brenda was the trendy high school type. She was confident, voted class favorite, in the band and a majorette. She was not snooty or stuck-up. Since we both went out for every available sport, we spent a lot of time traveling and playing together. And Brenda could do it all.

In track, Brenda participated in several events, including the hurdles and the mile relay. At one meet, after some of her events were completed, Coach Thomas asked

her to run in the half mile also, hoping she could score some points. He told her to stay on the heels of a tall red haired girl and that's just what she did, finishing second. Later he wondered if he should have reminded her to pass the red haired girl before crossing the finish line.

When we were seniors, our basketball teams did really well winning district. I had played second to Brenda all year but I didn't mind. She was good, much better than I and we were winning. During the playoff game someone fouled out and I went in. The game was tied up and we were in overtime. I got fouled but I didn't choke and made two picture perfect free throws. We finally won in a second overtime by four points. Later Brenda told me if I hadn't made those free throws we couldn't have won. She made me feel as though I'd won the game when I knew she had done so much more than I had.

We went our separate ways for college. I went 1500 miles away and Brenda stayed close to home, less than two hours away. In the summer of 1980, after our first year of college, Brenda was in a car accident. Thrown through the windshield, she received over 300 stitches in her face and head. I was home that summer and went to see her. How my heart ached. That beautiful, smiling face was bruised and



*Historic Tyler Lori D. Martin*

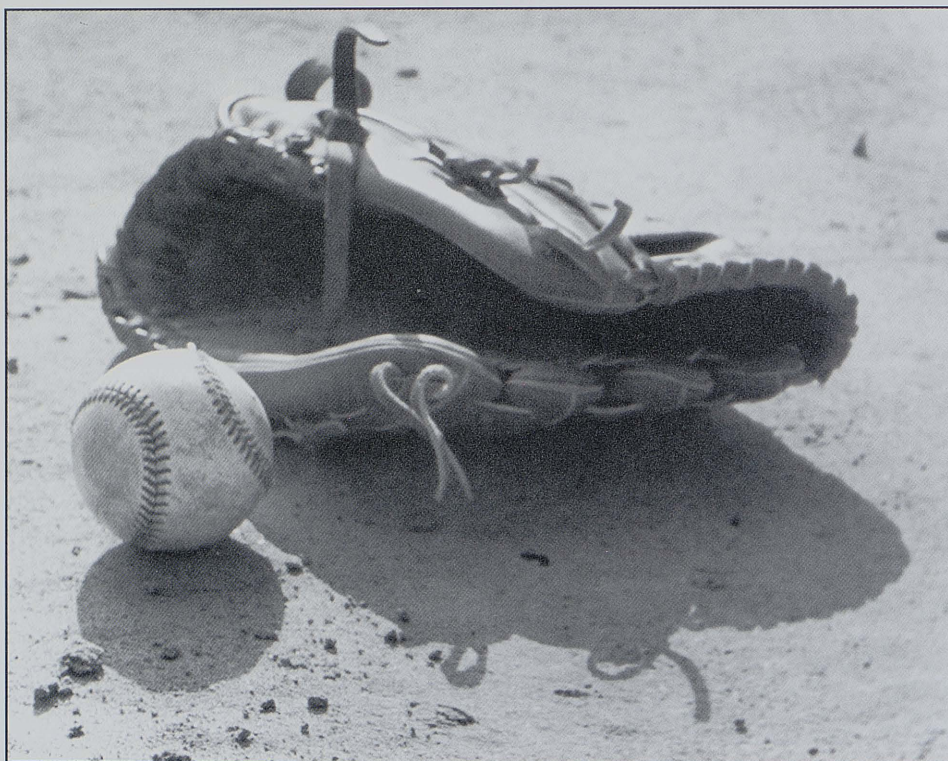


mangled. I saw her again before the summer was over and realized something special about her. The scars were only on the outside. Inside she was still Brenda laughing, smiling, still in love with life and willing to face whatever it had to offer. Then, while I spent over ten years trying to find my "happily ever after," Brenda was making hers. She married a wonderful guy we had gone to school with, went to work as a teacher's aide for the elementary school she had attended as a child, involved herself as much as possible in her boys lives and helped coach the high school softball team. It seemed everyone knew her. She was always willing to help in any way no matter how small or big. At our class reunion we didn't think we had changed at all.

I thought she was more beautiful than ever. No scars on this girl, Brenda was still the bright, happy person I had known in my school days. She lived life to the fullest, meeting it head on, taking part in so many activities you wondered how she managed to find time to do it all. But she did. She was like an angel to some, the way she helped without complaining or being asked. Maybe God decided he needed just such an angel in heaven.

I started going to the same church as Brenda in 1993. For two years I had the opportunity to renew an old friendship. Looking back, I see Brenda as modern day George Bailey. She touched the lives of so many people in so many ways they probably can't be counted. I

know it's true because of the number of people who responded to her death. At the funeral home that handled her arrangements a record of number of visitors came to express their sympathy to her parents and other family members, over 2,000 in three hours. At the funeral, there was standing room only. Several hundred mourners were in attendance. I wonder if she even knew that she had touched so many people. Yes, Brenda was a real life George Bailey, influencing everyone she met with her beautiful smile and warm personality. And yet, somehow she had a way of making you feel special, as if she was thanking you for your friendship.



*America's Game Jamie I. Humphrey*



# Honestly

*Shauna D. Starns*

I seem incomplete and young  
Childish, and still "oh, so mature"  
I still yearn for you, and  
What I think we should have.

Wanting things I cannot endure.

Realizing it is my inadequacy  
That has taken me this far.

And I sink lower now,  
Because this is me  
Who I am, who I will be.

And I am so scared now.

So frightened of hurting you,  
The one I care about.

Aware of my selfishness,  
Conscious of my inability to compete  
With your emotions.

Knowing my love doesn't equal yours.

You are so far ahead,  
I cannot even see you.  
You have turned the  
Corner, and there is no  
Looking back.

No retracing of your steps.

And still—  
I'm not ready  
For the commitment you seek.

I'm overwhelmed, then  
Succumb to the pressure,  
And resolutely turn my face.



# Caveat

*Earl G. Lovelady*

Beneath the mask of civility, humanity bears a false grin.  
Lingering is a blackness of brutality and malicious intent.  
Intellectually castrating those we see as human waste.

Must this uneven keel persist?

Must anguish be passed from our lips like flatulence polluting free  
minds with the stench of ignorance and of arrogance...

Heed this warning

Be warned I say

Welling up inside those who receive these daily doses of such  
undeserved fecal matter lies a sleeping phoenix waiting to rise and  
deliver an unrelenting wrath.

Cruel words soar within the current of the wind seeking to impale  
the soul of the unsuspecting.

Know this, to underestimate the threshold tolerance for grief lies death in wait.

Be it ye or thee.



*Rainy Nights* Jamie I. Humphrey



# A Lonely Girl

*Nicki A. Haynes*

She wakes at nine  
gets out of bed  
and turns the music on.

A bath feels good,  
the water's hot  
and the pain goes away.

She starts her day  
by cleaning house,  
everything in its place.

A salad at three,  
read a book  
and take a little rest.

A jog at five  
to watch her weight,  
can't gain a pound.

It's a pretty day,  
the sun is bright  
and the sky is clear.

Then at seven  
another bath;  
she must prepare for work.

Fix her hair,  
brush her teeth  
and put the makeup on.

She's a beautiful girl  
with reddish hair  
and soft brown eyes.

She hates herself  
but what to do?  
This is the only way.

Another night,  
she's on the street.  
The rent is coming due.

Another guy,  
she does her best,  
A little extra in the jar.

This lonely girl,  
she cries a while  
and then the sleep will come.

Where will it end?  
She doesn't know.  
She can only pray.

Someone to care  
is all she asks.  
There is always hope.

Hold to that hope,  
hold on tight.  
It's all that keeps her alive.

She wakes at nine  
gets out of bed  
and turns the music on...





*Insomnia* Amy D. Phillips



## Behind the Mask

*Amy D. Phillips*

Don't let the mask fool you, you don't really know me  
You claim that I am complex, a walking contradiction  
Yet I only see myself as confused  
I question why I have my barrier and pent up emotions

See my mask is not tear proof so it is rare that you will see me cry  
Because if I destroy the mask with tears I am vulnerable  
Without my mask I am opened for you to make your true judgment

Don't admire my strength because I am still a scared child  
Not knowing how to express how I really feel  
Because I am ashamed of these emotions

If I could become my image I think my soul would find peace  
But then again I could be wrong  
Don't let the words mask how I really feel; it is a tool I have perfected  
If you want to know what is behind the mask hear what I am not saying

Hear the person that needs to be reassured because I am not always confident  
Hear the person that needs touch because I don't want to keep everyone at a distance  
Hear the person that is scared to make a mistake because I make wrong decisions  
Hear the person that wants companionship but doesn't know how to reach out  
Hear the person that needs your advice because I don't know what to do  
Hear me





*Wolves Tiffany C. Wooten*



# Dear Brother

*Cynthia D.Nutt*

Oh my dear brother, how do I breathe joy back into you?  
If only I could pry those chains and shackles from your mind.  
How does one go about persuading another to live?  
Maybe they have never known what it is to truly live.  
That is, living with a life that is full and abundant.

Oh my dear brother, how do I breathe joy back into you?  
If it was as easy as giving my life for yours, I would.  
If only for the satisfaction of knowing I will see you again someday.  
My life I would give, yes, I would.  
I know I should pay more attention to you but I get hurt every time I do.

Oh my dear brother, how do I breathe joy back into you?  
God breathed life into us all and now I just want to see you go on.  
This whole thing is so very gray.  
Yet for you it is neither black nor white nor is it gray.  
It is all black. How did it ever get this way?

Oh my dear brother, how do I breathe joy back into you?  
If only I could crack you open and have a look inside.  
At the very least, I would know if you are sane and sad or just raving mad!  
Speaking of mad, I am real pissed-off! Why does it have to be like this at all?

Oh my dear brother, how do I breathe joy back into you?  
Can't you see the beauty of life that is all around?  
See the new baby, the clouds and the sky?  
Can you smell the rain, especially on the fresh-plowed field?  
Do you? Do you? Damn it, Wake-up! I am trying to tell you I love you and don't give up!  
Please, God, don't let him give up!



# My Love's Prayer

*Jason B. Bates*

I stopped and thought of God's love and mercy;  
How that no matter what, He will always be there,  
I can't help but want that same love.  
To be able to follow by the Perfect example.  
A promise of love, dedication and loyalty;  
For God's same desire was to prove the ultimate love,  
and by that He sent His only Son.  
I would pray the Lord to teach me,  
Show me, to guide me, in the ways of His will.  
For you my love, is His gift not only to me,  
but to the world.  
I have been given a glimpse through God's eyes  
to see and witness Your rare beauty.  
A beauty that goes beyond the exterior to reveal the heart;  
A heart full of passion for Him and I.  
The purity of the heart's tender love.  
May God's perfect will shape and mold us;  
To form our desires, motives, passions,  
and love to be of His way.  
To keep us from lust's tight grip;  
To be wise and aware of all that transpires,  
and to allow God full reign and control  
over such a fragile emotion  
Our love for each other.

## Mamma Bear

*Amy D. Phillips*

It is hard to believe one hand could mold so many worlds  
Or that one shoulder could be opened to any student's sorrows  
That one person could touch so many lives  
But at the same time exist with modesty

I do not claim to understand all of your gifts  
But it was your gift, which called my character  
The character that needed to be nourished  
So that I can become more than just what society has labeled me

It was your eyes, which penetrated my facade  
A mask that had devoured who I really was  
Trust allowed you within my walls  
To view all thoughts, feelings and emotions which were prisoners to expression

It will be your hands, which help mold my world  
Your shoulders that will absorb my tears during self-discovery  
Out of all the lives you touch, you will leave a permanent imprint on mine  
As you exist within modesty I hope you can accept my gratitude



# Destitution

*Stacey L. McKain*

The cool September night let loose its desperate hold of the day and the first amber rays of the sun seemed to mourn its departure. Her weathered face, etched by years of toil, could not turn away from the despairing sight that unraveled before her. Two children tried in vain to hide themselves from the pungent air assaulting their senses. Another child slept as the dead, unaware of the frenzied flames that ate at his home like a ravenous tiger.

The one room shanty fought bravely against its foe. Its roof, made of tar and discarded gray shingles, still sat perfectly intact despite the battle being fought beneath it. Each wall tried its best to contain the fire, but as she watched, the flames began to taunt her through gaps they had created. She could hear the sound of breaking glass and knew it was faces of her ancestors that gave sacrifice to the flames. The one lonely window added its cry to the torrid scene as it crashed to the ground, no longer supported by the northern wall.

The antique cradle made of oak that had rocked her children to sleep, was briefly outlined by the russet flames. Its basket was swinging to and fro as if trying to avoid the heat, only to be consumed by the merciless raging inferno.

In the next instant, the roof, no longer supported by the walls, gave up its fight and fell with a sickening crash. The flames attacked with vigor, as if punishing it for its defiance. The flames continued to devour her home until nothing

was left but black, jagged remains of supporting timbers.

As the last embers died, she was finally able to turn her eyes from the tragedy. To the east, the sun was just beginning its arduous trek into the pale blue sky. A lone hawk, flying low, cried out in hunger, his keen eyes searching the dry grassland for breakfast. A road, two ruts made by wagon wheels, seemed to disappear into the horizon.

To the south, just beyond the blackened potbellied stove and its chimney now standing in solitude among the ashes, she saw the small corral of skimpy logs and a lean-to built of misshapen pieces of board and tin. It sheltered an old sway-backed horse that stood motionless, except for the occasional swish of his tail to fend off the constant swarm of gnats and flies.

Behind the lean-to she could see her three acres of wheat, their golden heads bent and broken, their leaves brittle from lack of rain. To the west was a small shed with a peaked red roof and a chicken coop. The chickens insistently pecked the ground, searching for some small bit of seed. The white-washed shed door hung haphazardly on its rusty hinges; a good wind would relieve it of its burden. To the north behind her, more grassland stretched as far as she could see, meeting the horizon in drab, watercolor contrast.

She closed her eyes for a brief moment, but the insistent tugging at her left side forced her to look into the doleful brown eyes of

her daughter. Eldest by two years, she stood before her mother in a well-worn, denim gray nightdress, her short, sun-streaked blond hair still tousled from the effects of the night, her porcelain face streaked with soot and tears.

"Mother, what do we do now?" she asked in a soft whisper, her voice edged with fear.

"Mother, I'm hungry," her son of nine years echoed from her right. She turned her gaze to meet his eyes, gray as a stormy sky, ready to pour out its soul. His small, thin frame, wrapped in a threadbare muslin shirt, shivered in the coolness of dawn's breath, and he wore no shoes on his bare feet.

Unable to answer their pleading questions, she turned her own brown eyes upon herself. Her feet, too, were bare, the edge of her nightdress in tatters around her calves. Her sister's infant son lay in her lap. Wrapped in an old tan gentleman's jacket, he slept, his alabaster skin unmarred by troubles. He breathed evenly with deep intakes of air. She looked at her hands, scarred and cracked, her skin the color of dried tobacco. She leaned her head back against the water well, made of packed dried mud and once more closed her eyes.

All around them was the acrid smell of their burnt home. The fierceness of the fire now gone, a stoic calm was all that remained of their anguish. The four destitute figures sat unmoving in aftermath. The day had only just begun.



# Adrift

*Earl G. Lovelady*

We weather the storm alone.  
Even with the raft of friendship close at hand.



*Solitude* Lori D. Martin







